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Division of Naval History  
Ships' Histories Section  
Navy Department

### HISTORY OF USS HAVEN (AH 12)

Built to provide the best of hospital care only a few miles from the scene of battle, the Navy's hospital ships have aided materially in reducing the fatality rate for battle casualties. In many battles, those who died as a result of wounds far out-numbered those killed in battle. At times during the Korean action, however, less than one half of one percent of all men treated by hospital ships died.

Placed in commission during the closing months of World War II, USS HAVEN was one of the hospital ships sent to Korea to handle casualties there. Almost 15,000 patients were treated on board, in many cases only a few hours after they had been hit.

Built as the SS MARINE HAWK by the Sun Shipbuilding Corporation at Chester, Pennsylvania, the ship was taken over by the Navy in 1944 for conversion to a hospital ship. She was placed in commission as USS HAVEN at the Todd Erie Basin, Brooklyn, New York, on 5 May 1945, and turned over to her first commanding officer, Captain T. T. Patterson, USN (Ret).

After her shakedown and a yard period at Portsmouth, Virginia, the ship sailed for the Pacific, transiting the Panama Canal on 22 June 1945 and arriving in Pearl Harbor on 6 July. Already she had taken aboard three patients, one injured aboard a merchant ship near where HAVEN was operating on her shakedown cruise, and two emergency appendectomies taken aboard during her voyage from Panama to Pearl Harbor.

On 23 July USS HAVEN received her first contingent of patients. Six hundred ninety-one patients were embarked, the majority of whom were neuropsychiatric and tuberculosis cases. Transporting these to San Francisco, the ship returned to Pearl Harbor, where she was moored when peace was declared. The following day she sailed to Okinawa.

Arriving on 28 August, the ship was then ordered to Nagasaki, Japan, where she arrived on 11 September 1945 to evacuate Allied ex-prisoners of war. During the rest of the year she was employed on this mission, processing and hospitalizing about 10,000 from prison camps on Kyushu and transporting patients and ex-prisoners to Okinawa, Saipan, Guam and San Francisco. Christmas 1945, found the ship enroute to Philippines, where she picked up returning patients and passengers for the United States.

Next assigned to the historic atomic bomb tests, the ship was sent to San Francisco for repairs and to load equipment to be used in the tests. On 22 April 1946 Captain A. C. Thorington, USN, relieved Captain Patterson as commanding officer.

On 29 May HAVEN sailed to Pearl Harbor with radiological safety personnel and laboratory equipment on board for the atomic tests. From there she steamed to Bikini, arriving on 12 June.

During the operation, the ship handled hospitalization of personnel attached to the Task Force in addition to carrying the control groups who determined the safety factors in the experiments. She remained at Bikini until 25 August, when she sailed to Kwajalein to continue as laboratory and berthing ship for the radiological personnel while the target vessels were being inspected there.

On 10 October she sailed for the United States, via Pearl Harbor, arriving in Oakland on the 23rd. After removing her special equipment and undergoing decontamination, she was again assigned to naval transportation service. After trips to Guam and Pearl Harbor, she was ordered to San Pedro, California for final decontamination and decommissioning. On 13 May 1947 Lieutenant Commander S. D. Frey, USN, relieved Captain Thorington as commanding officer and in June the ship was placed out of commission in reserve, attached to the San Diego group of the Pacific Reserve Fleet.

When the North Koreans crossed the 38th parallel in June 1950, the need for hospital ships became acute. BENEVOLENCE, a sister ship, was preparing to head for the Korean Coast when, off fog-bound San Francisco, she was lost in a collision. Almost immediately a recommissioning detail went to work on the HAVEN, and on 15 September 1950 her commissioning pennant was again flown. Captain V. B. Tate, USN, assumed command, and most of the hospital crew of the ill-fated BENEVOLENCE were on board when she sailed ten days later.

The HAVEN dropped her freshly-painted anchor in murky Inchon Harbor on 18 October 1950, just a few days after the amphibious invasion by the United Nations forces. For 89 days she stayed there, treating UN casualties with an average of 530 patients on board. On 19 November a high mark was reached with 770.

As the Communist hordes counter-attacked, reaching the outskirts of Seoul, UN forces were forced to retreat, and HAVEN stood alone, save for three LSTs. When Inchon was fired and abandoned, she finally moved south, arriving in Pusan, Korea, on 8 January 1951. After an exchange of patients with Army medical facilities in the area, HAVEN was ordered to Yokohama and then to Sasebo, Japan, to act as station hospital for units of the United Nations Fleet.

On 4 February an urgent message was received, ordering the vessel to Pusan to augment the medical facilities of USS CONSOLATION. Casualties were very heavy during the Communist offensive, and about 700 patients were admitted during the nine days the ship was in port. Ordered from there to Inchon, she arrived on 16 February.

There were only a limited number of United Nations personnel on duty in the Inchon area. The Communists controlled the hills surrounding Kimpo airfields, thereby preventing ambulance planes from ferrying patients to where they could be evacuated to HAVEN. These two factors kept the ship from much medical activity during her six-week stay.

When HAVEN returned to Pusan on 26 April, the Communists offensive had reached terrific proportions, and HAVEN's daily patient load reached 500. On



22 September she underwent a change of command, when Captain C. B. Hamblett, USNR, took command. Captain G. G. Blodgett, MC, USN, had previously taken command of the hospital, relieving Captain C.D. Riggs, MC, USN. HAVEN's first cruise in the Far East ended on 16 October 1951 when she set course for home, after having admitted over 8,500 patients while treating an additional 23,000 outpatients.

HAVEN left San Francisco on 7 January 1952 to begin her second Korean tour, which covered a period of nine months. Operating in Pusan and Inchon, she received patients by train and helicopter from the front lines. She returned to Japan three times for the short stays necessary to evacuate patients and to effect repairs, receiving and treating a total of 3,367 patients. Fifty-four percent of these were subsequently discharged from the ship and returned to duty. The efficiency and worth of the ship is reflected in the low death rate, only one-half of one percent of all cases handled. Her signal success can best be appreciated by taking into account the fact that a large proportion of her cases were serious battle casualties, requiring immediate and specialized care.

Stationed at Inchon in August 1952, HAVEN found her facilities and personnel put to a rigorous test as the results of the bitter Bunker Hill fighting, which had just begun. Over 1200 patients were treated in a single month. In recognition of her valiant support of the United Nations battle for freedom, President Syngman Ree awarded the ship the Korean Presidential Unit Citation.

On 16 September, just prior to her departure, General Lemuel Shepherd, Commandant of the U. S. Marine Corps, visited HAVEN personally to render his thanks for what he termed the "loving care" given to his troops in Korea.

After a well-earned state-side tour, the ship sailed from San Diego on 24 January 1953, this time fitted with a new flight deck. During her previous tour, it had been necessary to improvise a flight deck of pontoon barges to handle patients brought in by helicopter. When she resumed her station in Inchon Harbor on 19 February 1953, she again received patients by train and helicopter from the front lines, returning to Japan twice to evacuate patients and make repairs.

During this tour, HAVEN received and treated a total of 2884 patients. Five hundred helicopter landings brought in 576 patients. The death rate during this tour amounted to one percent of all cases handled.

As in her second Korean tour, HAVEN found her personnel put to a rigorous test when the bitter Bunker Hill battle burst anew in April. From this furious fighting came a majority of the serious battle casualties handled by the ship, many of them brought direct from the battle to settle by helicopter on the ship's flight deck, only a few minutes from the man's initial hit.

As of September 1953, the ship is still active, assigned to the Pacific Fleet.

USS HAVEN received the Navy Occupation Service Medal, Asia, for the period 2 September - 3 October 1945.

She earned the Korean Service Medal for the period 12 October 1950 - 15 October 1951; with five Engagement Stars for participation in the following operations:

- 1 Star/North Korean Aggression -- 17 October - 2 November 1950
- 1 Star/Communist China Aggression -- 3 November 1950 - 24 January 1951
- 1 Star/First United Nations Counter Offensive -- 25 January - 21 April 1951
- 1 Star/Communist China Spring Offensive -- 22 January - 8 July 1951
- 1 Star/United Nations Summer-Fall Offensive -- 9 July - 15 October 1951

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#### STATISTICS

OVERALL LENGTH	520 feet
BEAM	72 feet
SPEED	18 knots
DISPLACEMENT	11,400 tons
COMPLEMENT	82 Officers -- 539 enlisted

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